

CTS Government Shutdown Talking Points & Phone Scripts

There are two different messaging tracks available 1) Collaborative Tone and 2) Direct Tone to meet the needs of our diverse CTS Membership.

Provided below are talking points and phone call scripts for each messaging track that can be adapted and enhanced by community stories and Tribal Leader voices.

Collaborative Tone: Government Shutdown Reduction in Force Talking Points:

- **Concern about the OMB Announcement:** Indian Country is concerned by the OMB Director's recent directive to federal agencies to begin preparing RIF plans in the event of a government shutdown. We are urging the White House to exempt all Indian Country-serving positions and programs, regardless of agency, from these RIFs. In alignment with the President's priorities, these positions carry out specific fulfillment of trust and treaty obligations by the federal government and furthers public safety, which the White House has acknowledged is appropriate for exemptions.
- **Support for Indian Country:** We appreciate the Administration's past support for Indian Country and recognition of the unique federal trust and treaty responsibilities owed to our Nations, citizens, and communities. Protecting federal programs and employees that serve Tribal Nations and Native people honors binding trust and treaty obligations and protects tribal sovereignty in line with the Administration's priorities.
- **Critical Services:** Federal employees working in Indian Country provide essential services that directly save and improve lives, including health care, education, housing, policing, and public safety and justice. Any reduction in these positions would immediately and severely harm Tribal citizens by cutting off critical lifelines our communities depend on every day.
- **Local Impact:** Many of these positions are filled by people from our communities, meaning they are not only service providers but also neighbors and relatives. Losing these employees would devastate local economies, increase unemployment, and deepen existing challenges in our regions.
- **No Disruptions:** Under no circumstances should employees who deliver services to Indian Country be subject to furloughs or reductions in force. Interruptions in these services are not only disruptive but dangerous, with potentially life-or-death consequences for Native communities.
- **Consistency Across Agencies:** These protections must be applied across all federal agencies, not just the Bureau of Indian Affairs or Indian Health Service. Indian Country programs also reside in nearly every department across the federal government, and exemptions must be consistent throughout the government.
- **Consequences of Inaction:** Failure to protect Indian Country-serving positions will place lives at risk, destabilize families, and obstruct essential services in health, safety, and education. Such actions would directly contradict the Administration's stated commitment to Tribal sovereignty and to strengthening local control of vital programs.

Collaborative Draft Phone Script:

"Hello, this is [Name], a Tribal leader from [Nation]. I am calling regarding the OMB directive for agencies to prepare reduction in force plans in the event of a shutdown.

Indian Country does not support a government shutdown, however in the event that a continuing resolution is not passed Indian Country cannot be subject to these cuts. Federal employees serving our programs provide critical, life-saving services. Any reduction would devastate our citizens, harm local economies, and violate trust and treaty obligations.

We are urging the White House to exempt all Indian Country-serving positions and programs – across all federal agencies – from these reductions. This is essential to protect lives and to honor the federal government's commitments to Tribal Nations. Thank you for your continued support of Indian Country."

Direct Tone: Government Shutdown Reduction in Force Talking Points:

- **Not a Bargaining Chip:** Tribal Nations have fully paid for the United States' trust and treaty obligations, yet we face setbacks year after year from political decisions in Washington. Our people, our children, and our programs cannot be treated as bargaining chips in political battles.
- **Native Lives Cannot Wait:** Tribal governments face a structural funding disadvantage that makes federal trust and treaty obligations critical to our survival. Even when programs have advance appropriations or forward funding, tribal programs are so severely underfunded that we rely on other federal grants and programs to care for our people. When the federal government shuts down, we see cracks in this system widen, immediately. This is why government shutdowns are directly and uniquely harmful to Indian Country.
- **Solutions Exist:** The path forward is clear. Tribal programs and the federal personnel who support them must be deemed essential in agency shutdown contingency plans and must be exempt from reductions in force. These protections will ensure continuity of services and uphold federal obligations to Tribal Nations.
- **Urgent Request to OMB and Agencies:** Even during a shutdown, the government provides funds for the protection of life and property. Each federal agency must request, and OMB must grant, an exception apportionment to fund Tribal programs and protect lives and property during a shutdown. Anything less leaves Native communities unfairly exposed in moments of crisis.

Direct Tone Phone Script:

"Hello, this is [Name], a Tribal leader from [Nation]. I am calling regarding the OMB directive for agencies to prepare reduction in force plans in the event of a shutdown.

The United States' trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations are not discretionary, Tribal programs are essential. We want to avoid a government shutdown, but a government shutdown cannot be allowed to put our lives and property at risk.

[Tell a brief story about the program(s) you want to protect. Bring the program(s) to life. Discuss how shutdowns directly impact people associated with the dollars and programs.]

OMB and Federal Agency leadership must:

- Deem tribal programs and federal staff who administer those programs essential in agency shutdown contingency plans.
- Exempt tribal program staff from any federal reductions in force,
- Each agency must request, and OMB must grant, exception apportionment to tribal programs for the protection of life and property.

I am not a bargaining chip. [My children OR our people OR my programs] are not a bargaining chip. Native lives can't wait."